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Letter dated 4 May 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a concept note for the Security Council open debate on "Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts", to be held on Wednesday, 11 May 2016 (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Amr **Aboulatta**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 4 May 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme

"Countering the narratives and ideologies of terrorism", to be held on 11 May 2016

Background

1. Over the past few years, the importance of countering the narratives and ideologies of terrorist groups has been gaining prominence and driven to the forefront of combating terrorism efforts worldwide. The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh), its expansion and its continued success in inspiring people from across the globe to leave their homes and join its ranks demonstrate the imperativeness of confronting the narratives and ideologies of terrorist groups, with a special focus on ISIL (Da'esh).

2. The ideologies of religiously inspired terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, Boko Haram, ISIL (Da'esh), the Nusrah Front and Al-Shabaab are the beliefs, values, principles and objectives that distinguish the identity and aims of those groups. The ideologies of those groups are very similar. They emanate and derive from the same extremist, *takfiri* and violent concepts and views that were propagated in the mid-twentieth century by some scholars who diverted the true and proper interpretation of religion to achieve political objectives. All those terrorist groups share the same ultimate goal of restoring, through violent means, the "caliphate" and establishing an Islamic State. The ideology underlying those groups also rejects the very concept of the nation State and seeks to remould national boundaries and to reshape national identities to conform to their pan-Islamic world view.

3. The ideologies of terrorist groups provide them with the intellectual foundation. This is mainly because the ideology of a terrorist group gives definition to the "enemies" by providing criteria to assess the "pious" or "the sinful" among persons and institutions. This gives rise to the concept of "legitimate targets". In this context, it is within the ideology of ISIL (Da'esh), for instance, that killing unbelievers in Islam is mandatory for every Muslim.

4. In the same vein, terrorist groups use their narratives and ideologies to justify their acts of violence, and to provide — based on erroneous and distorted interpretations — the religious and moral framework and pretext for their terrorist acts, both to the outside world and to themselves. This happens by shifting the onus of responsibility onto either their targets or other actors, whom, in ideological terms, terrorist groups hold responsible for the state of affairs which justify a violent response to rectify. By the assertion that it has established a religiously and political legitimate caliphate, ISIL (Da'esh) gave itself and its members the necessary justification for their terrorist acts by invoking misinterpretation of and distortion to the primary sources of the Islamic faith, the Koran and the Sunna. They believe that they are fighting for the protection and promotion of Islam and that they are purifying the world from the infidels.

5. Moreover, terrorist groups use their narratives and ideologies to recruit supporters and fighters. ISIL (Da'esh) is an example. It has managed to recruit tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters so far. A major reason for this advanced level of

successful recruitment of misled youth, men and women has been the group's ability to propagate its ideology, the use of propaganda and the mastery of the social media. The group manages to portray foreign terrorist fighters' lives within ISIL (Da'esh) camps and territories under its occupation as ones characterized by camaraderie, good morale and purposeful activity. The group insists that its members enjoy a sense of understated heroism and are elements of giving martyrdom for a sumptuous afterlife, a narrative designed in essence in order to attract family and friends. Moreover, this propaganda exploits perceptions of economic and political disenfranchisement among young Muslim women and men, especially in Europe.

6. Furthermore, terrorist groups use their narratives and ideologies for propaganda to project an image of strength and momentum and to illustrate that they exist strongly and influentially on the international scene. In addition, they use these narratives and ideologies to mobilize resources and garner support from sympathizers.

7. ISIL (Da'esh) has brought the usage of the narratives and ideologies by the terrorist groups to an unprecedented domain, by exploiting the media, social media and other online communications platforms, to target its audiences in around 100 countries, in nearly two dozen languages, with up to 90,000 tweets every day, and through themes allegedly related to Islam.

8. On the other hand, and while there is no shortage of interest to counter the narratives and ideologies of the terrorist groups, and ISIL (Da'esh) in particular, the international community has not yet been successful and continues to lag behind in this regard. This is mainly due to the absence of a real strategic vision and a comprehensive rather than an ad hoc and piecemeal approach, the lack of international actors' full comprehension of the ideology and the content of terrorist narratives, the ineffectiveness and the limitation in scope and funding of the current relevant efforts, and the lack of cooperation on the bilateral, regional and international levels. Furthermore, there is a lack of coordination and coherence among the efforts being undertaken to combat terrorist narratives and ideologies, and the non-existence of the necessary follow-up mechanism.

9. Thus, there is a need for a "comprehensive international strategy" to counter existing terrorist narratives and ideologies, as well as an appropriate mechanism to coordinate, follow up and mobilize the necessary action and resources.

Objectives

10. Therefore, the purpose of the debate is to listen to the various views and comments regarding two main points: first, the possible objectives and elements of a successful comprehensive international strategy for countering the narratives and ideologies of terrorist groups, with a special emphasis on ISIL (Da'esh); and second, the ideal mechanism to coordinate, follow up and mobilize the necessary action and resources.

11. The discussions should focus on the following:

(a) What would be a practical way to coordinate between the efforts of the United Nations and other forums (on the regional or the international levels) for countering the narratives and ideologies of terrorist groups, and especially ISIL (Da'esh)?

(b) What are the efforts being undertaken to counter and refute the narratives and the ideologies of the terrorist groups and to rectify the falsehood propagated by

them? What are the additional measures required to accomplish this? What role can the religious institutions play?

(c) What measures could be taken by the international community, in accordance with the rule of law and while ensuring freedom of speech, to counter terrorists' use of media, social media and other online communications platforms, including the Internet, for the dissemination of their narratives and ideologies?

(d) How can the international community develop and implement an effective messaging strategy, including ways to expose the evil perpetrated by ISIL (Da'esh)?

(e) What means are necessary to raise public awareness among the vulnerable, in particular youth, to steer them away from joining terrorist groups?

(f) What measures should be taken to enhance the cooperation and coordination between security and intelligence authorities of different countries, especially through the sharing of information and good practices, to counter the narratives and ideologies of terrorist groups?

(g) How can the necessary resources to fund efforts and strategies aimed at countering the narratives and ideologies of terrorist groups be enhanced?

(h) What legal measures should be implemented to counter the narratives and ideologies of the terrorist groups?

(i) Who are the stakeholders who should be engaged in the implementation of the strategy? Governments, civil society, including the religious leaders (Islamic/non-Islamic), the private sector and companies? What could each of these stakeholders contribute?

(j) What would be the scope, nature and mandate of a practical mechanism, within the United Nations, for follow-up on the implementation of a possible comprehensive international strategy?

Briefers

The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Jan Eliasson

The Secretary-General of Al Azhar Islamic Research Academy, Mohi El Din Afifi

The Vice-President and Deputy General Counsel of Microsoft, Steven A. Crown

Expected outcome

12. A presidential statement is envisaged, based on the views and comments presented during the debate and on agreement among members of the Security Council. The statement could request the Counter-Terrorism Committee to present, in close consultations with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and other relevant United Nations entities and international and regional organizations, as well as interested Member States, to propose to the Council, by April 2017, a "comprehensive international strategy" on countering narratives and ideologies of terrorist groups, with special emphasis on ISIL (Da'esh). This proposal should also include options for a mechanism that would be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the strategy and the mobilization of the necessary resources.